

UNLEASHING THE POWER OF SUPERVISORY FEEDBACK IN ACADEMIC WRITING: STRATEGIES FOR TIMELY UNDERGRADUATE THESIS COMPLETION

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Abstract: Despite its critical importance in academic writing, effective feedback strategies in undergraduate thesis supervision remains under-researched. This case study aims to address this gap by examining the experiences of five English department students who completed their theses and the strategies their supervisors employed to facilitate timely completion. Utilizing semi-structured interviews and text analysis, the study addresses three key research questions: 1) how feedback is formulated; 2) what strategies are employed by supervisors; and 3) what are the students' perception of the strategies. The findings indicate that most feedback was formulated as directive, and the supervisors' strategies include timely, personalized feedback and additional supervision time. The strategies help improve student engagement, motivation, and thesis outcomes. The students also positively perceived the supervisors' strategies. This study contributes mainly by highlighting the role of emotional support in thesis supervision, the dominance of directive feedback in fostering timely completion, and the importance of personalized, timely feedback for student engagement. Additionally, it emphasizes that supervisors need to employ strategic, multifaceted approaches that combine academic guidance with emotional encouragement.

Keywords: academic writing, supervisory feedback, thesis writing, supervisor, higher education

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Writing a thesis presents numerous challenges for undergraduate students including those studying in English departments. These challenges include limited language proficiency, insufficient academic writing skills, and low self-efficacy in academic writing (Casado-Lumbreras & Colomo-Palacios, 2014; Malaga-Toboła et al., 2019); strained relationships with supervisors (Roberts & Laura Hyatt, 2019; Tremblay-Wragg et al., 2021); difficulties in maintaining coherence and developing ideas, and overreliance on supervisory guidance (Bitchener et al., 2011); as well as a lack of research and analytical skills and inadequate understanding of the subject matter (Bastola, 2020; Paltridge & Starfield, 2019).

In Indonesian context, several studies reported similar challenges in thesis writing encompassing psychological, sociocultural, and linguistic issues (Dwihandini et al., 2013; Puspita, 2019), supervisor communication (Tira Nur Fitria, 2019), self-esteem, student-lecturer relationships, and linguistic skills (Rizwan & Naas, 2022), struggles with research initiation and reading strategies (Sa'diah et al., 2023), academic writing competencies, technological challenges, time management, field research, and motivation (Nurkamto et al., 2022). Supervisors play a pivotal role in this regard, to help students navigate the challenges and enhance their confidence and communication skills (Basturkmen et al., 2014; Bitchener et al., 2011; Carter & Kumar, 2017; Li et al., 2017; Pare, 2011; Rowena Murray, 2011; Xu & Hu, 2020).

Supervisors' feedback support is, therefore, essential. However, research on effective feedback in academic writing in undergraduate level is limited. Most studies have examined specific aspects in thesis supervision such as supervisory roles (Ädel et al., 2023), feedback strategies (Lei & Pramoolsook, 2020), and student experiences (Henttonen et al., 2023; Karlsholm et al., 2024; Khan et al., 2023). In contrast, research on graduate supervision has been more extensive, covering effective strategies (Duncan, 2024; Grohnert et al., 2023; Jusslin & Widlund, 2024), literature reviews (Chugh et al., 2022; Nasiri & Mafakheri, 2014), supervisory goals (Kreber & Wealer, 2023; Yazdani & Alimorad, 2022), challenges (Henderson et al., 2019; Neupane Bastola, 2022) and various perspectives on thesis writing (Afful et al., 2022; Aldosari & Ibrahim, 2019; Haven et al., 2023; Sonmez Aydin et al., 2023). In Indonesia, most research have explored supervision practices and challenges (Abrar et al., 2023; Akbar et al., 2023; Lumbantobing, 2022; Nurjati & Bandjarjani, 2023; Suarga et al., 2023). Despite these efforts, there remains a notable lack of comprehensive frameworks and models specifically tailored to address the unique needs of undergraduate students.

This study aims to contribute towards the development of a framework which delineates critical aspects of thesis supervision, including feedback formulation, supervisors' strategies, and students' perceptions. Collectively, these elements are fundamental in facilitating comprehensive thesis development and play a significant role in ensuring the timely completion of thesis writing. Specifically, this study examines effective undergraduate thesis supervision practices at a private college in Indonesia. The college was selected due to its effective undergraduate thesis supervision and accessibility, which facilitated comprehensive data collection for a thorough and an inclusive analysis of various perspectives. The study seeks to answer the following research questions: (1) How is feedback formulated in undergraduate thesis supervision? (2) What strategies are employed by supervisors in thesis supervision? (3) What are students' perceptions of the strategies employed by supervisors in thesis supervision?

METHOD

Research Context and Design

This study was a case study involving a six-month fieldwork aimed to identify effective practices in undergraduate thesis supervision. Employing a phenomenological approach, this case study delved into effective thesis supervision by examining feedback formulation,

supervisor strategies, and students' perceptions of thesis supervision. Phenomenology represents the most suitable research design for exploring and comprehending the shared experiences of multiple individuals. Employing this approach will facilitate an in-depth understanding of the meaning and essence underlying the participants' experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). This approach is well-suited for the current study, which focuses on understanding participants' lived experiences concerning feedback formulation, supervisors' strategies, and students' perceptions of thesis supervision practices.

Participants and Informed Consent

Prior to commencing empirical fieldwork, the researchers convened with five students engaged in thesis writing and five thesis supervisors to explain the informed consent process. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to obtain comprehensive and meaningful insights, capitalizing on the method's strength in capturing humanistic elements (Flick, 2014). This technique, also referred to as judgment sampling (Lune & Berg, 2017; Mohajan, 2018) ensures that the sample accurately reflects the characteristics relevant to the study. The students were selected for they were supervised by two different supervisors and they had completed their undergraduate theses within the expected timeframe.

Emphasis was placed on confidentiality, publication intentions, and the right to withdraw from the study, with all participants providing voluntary consent. In this phenomenological study, the inclusion of ten participants was considered adequate to encompass diverse perspectives, focus on individual experiences, and address resource constraints. The researchers, designated as RS, conducted semi-structured interviews with five supervisors (coded as Sp1 to Sp5), as well as with five students (coded as S1 to S5).

Data Collection

Empirical data were predominantly gathered through semi-structured interviews and text analysis. Examination of multi-stage thesis drafts facilitated the feedback formulation. Semi-structured interviews were systematically conducted to procure comprehensive insights into supervisors' strategies and students' perceptions of supervisors' strategies employed in thesis supervision. Each interview question was tailored to reflect the participant's individual experiences (see Table 1 and Table 2).

Table 1. Sample interview guidelines with supervisors

No	Themes	Questions
1.	Feedback Types	What types of feedback do you provide?
2.	Focus Areas	Do you provide feedback on: (a) Content; (b) Organization; (c) Linguistic Accuracy; (d) Appropriateness?
3.	Feedback Modes	How do you provide the feedback?

Table 2. Sample interview guidelines with students

No	Themes	Questions
1.	Importance of Feedback	Do you think supervisory feedback is important?
2.	Feedback Preferences	Which types of supervisory feedback do you prefer?
3.	Students' Perceptions	How do you perceive the feedback provided by supervisor?

Since we used semi-structured interviews, each question relied on the participants' stories. Following initial responses, probe questions were strategically employed to delve deeper and reveal nuanced insights. Interviews typically spanned 45 to 60 minutes and were recorded with participants' consent, subsequently transcribed, reviewed, and edited. Conducted in both Indonesian and English, the interviews prioritized Indonesian to ensure precise comprehension and accurate representation of terms lacking suitable English translations. The data presented in this research article have been translated accordingly.

Data Analysis

Thesis drafts from each student were systematically analysed to discern the formulation of supervisory feedback. Each piece of written feedback underwent meticulous reading and coding based on its pragmatic functions—referential, directive, and expressive following an analytical framework synthesized from previous studies (Basturkmen et al., 2014; Kumar & Stracke, 2007; Saeed et al., 2021; Xu, 2017) (see Table 3 for the framework and Figure 1 and Figure 2 for a sample of feedback analysis).

Table 3. Framework for analyzing feedback formulation

Pragmatic functions	Intentions	Linguistic feature
Directive	Eliciting information	Interrogative
	Seeking justification	Interrogative
	Seeking clarification	Interrogative
	Seeking confirmation	Interrogative
	Suggesting what to do	Advisory Interrogative
	Telling what to do/not to do	Imperative
Referential	Providing Information	Statement
	Providing Correction	Indirect Correction
Expressive	Praise	Positive response
	Criticism	Negative response

1.3 Research Objectives

1. Students' perceptions towards the lecturers' TPACK models implemented during the instruction
2. The challenges that the Indonesian EFL teacher candidate teachers faced toward the implementation of TPACK
3. Type of TPACK base practices carried out from the Indonesian EFL teacher

Windows User July 04, 2022

Start with to investigate or describe student perception towards the lecturers' TPACK models during the instruction. Do the same thing for research question number 2 and 3

Focus	Intentions	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	Total
Content	Clarity of expression						
	Elaboration						
	Consistency	1					
	Supporting arguments						
	Relevance of ideas						
	Sub-total number						
Linguistic Accuracy	Grammar						
	Sentence structure						
	Vocabulary choice	1					
	Spelling and punctuation						
	Sub-total number						

Figure 1. Sample of feedback formulation analysis

Additionally, each feedback was categorized in terms of its focus or the specific area of the thesis it addressed, including content, organization, linguistic accuracy, and appropriateness (see Figure 2).

1.6 Definition of Key Term

Indonesian EFL teacher candidate : Indonesian college student which study in English education department.

TPACK : Technological Pedagogic Content Knowledge, learning that uses the application of a combined educational system that puts forward technology and certain applications (content) in learning

Windows User July 04, 2022

It is better for you to use Indonesian EFL prospective teacher instead of candidate. Be consistent using this term in your thesis!

Types	Intentions	Linguistic feature	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	Total
Directive	Eliciting information	Interrogative						
	Seeking justification	Interrogative						
	Seeking clarification	Interrogative						
	Seeking confirmation	Interrogative						
	Suggesting what to do	Advisory Interrogative						
	Telling what to do/not to do	Imperative		1				

Figure 2. Sample of feedback focus analysis

Semi-structured interview findings were transcribed verbatim and pseudonyms were employed to ensure participant anonymity. Data analysis utilized Braun & Clarke (2006) thematic coding analysis to identify recurring patterns and emerging themes. The data were systematically organized and categorized according to recurring patterns pertinent to the research question. The themes were identified and coded as follows: FTyp for Feedback Types, FArea for Feedback Areas, FMod for Feedback Modes, ImpF for Importance of Feedback, FPref for Feedback Preferences, and SPer for Students' Perceptions.

This approach enabled the refinement and reporting of final themes relevant to the research questions. The coding process involved consensus-building among the authors, achieved through discussions during both coding and interpretation phases. Ensuring the trustworthiness of analysis and interpretation, member-checking and triangulation methods were implemented. Member-checking involved validation of findings by both authors and participants, thereby confirming the clarity and accuracy of data interpretation (Harreveld et al., 2016).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Feedback Formulation in Undergraduate Thesis Supervision

This section analyzes the formulation of written feedback in L2 academic writing, particularly provided during undergraduate thesis supervision, emphasizing its pragmatic functions and focal areas. The examination considers the types of feedback—directive, referential, and expressive—and their relative frequency across various stages of the thesis writing process. Furthermore, the content of the feedback is categorized into key aspects, including content, linguistic accuracy, organization, and appropriateness. The analysis across the various stages of thesis writing revealed that the majority of written feedback was formulated as directive, followed by referential feedback. In contrast, expressive feedback was the least frequently provided (see Table 4).

Table 4. The formulation of feedback in undergraduate thesis supervision

Types of Feedback	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	Total
Directive	26	36	88	25	27	202
Referential	0	2	28	4	9	43
Expressive	1	3	2	1	2	9
Total	27	41	118	30	38	254

Meanwhile, the distribution of feedback highlights that most written feedback addressed on content, followed by linguistic accuracy, organization and appropriateness (see Table 5).

Table 5. The focus of feedback in undergraduate thesis supervision

Focus of Feedback	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	Total
Content	19	14	47	22	18	120
Organization	3	14	19	2	8	46
Linguistic Accuracy	3	4	38	2	5	52
Appropriateness	2	9	14	4	7	36
Total	27	41	118	30	38	254

Moreover, the written feedback provided across various aspects of thesis writing was systematically cross-referenced based on its pragmatic functions. Specifically, directive feedback predominated in content-related feedback, with additional contributions in feedback on organization, linguistic accuracy, and appropriateness (see Table 6).

Table 6. The cross-reference of feedback formulation and thesis aspects

Feedback Formulation	Aspects				Total
	Content	Organization	Linguistic Accuracy	Appropriateness	
Directive	111	43	26	22	202
Referential	25	3	8	7	43
Expressive	4	2	3	0	9
Total	140	48	37	29	254

Supervisor Strategies in Undergraduate Thesis Supervision

Effective undergraduate thesis supervision involves employing diverse strategies to support students' progress and timely completion. These include motivational feedback, actionable directive feedback, tailored and timely feedback, and additional supervision sessions. The following sections detail these strategies, illustrating their application through examples from supervisory practices.

Giving Motivational Feedback

Motivational feedback plays a crucial role in encouraging students to remain engaged and committed to completing their theses. Sp1 motivates students by empowering them to actively engage in their theses and complete them on time. Similarly, Sp2 acknowledges student progress, while Sp3 emphasizes the importance of quick graduation and future prospects such as marriage. Additionally, Sp4 fosters motivation by maintaining communication and creating a supportive environment. Meanwhile, Sp5 combines positive reinforcement with actionable feedback to support thesis progress. These are evidenced below.

“When I notice a student feeling down, I offer emotional support and encouragement to help them regain motivation. I work with them to identify ways to improve their progress and push them to work more efficiently, with the goal of helping them graduate sooner.” (Sp1)

"I give verbal praise, such as 'This is good,' to acknowledge and encourage students when they improve their work based on the feedback provided." (Sp2)

"I often encourage my students with phrases like, "Let's graduate quickly," or "Finish your thesis and then get married," to keep them motivated and positive." (Sp3)

"I developed a timeline outlining when they need to attend tutoring sessions and when they should complete their thesis exams. The feedback I provide typically includes reminders to help students stay on track and finish their thesis on time." (Sp4)

"I focus on giving more positive feedback than negative. This approach helps to motivate students and encourages them to stay engaged throughout the thesis writing process." (Sp5)

Giving Actionable Directive Feedback

Directive feedback is essential in guiding students through specific aspects of their thesis development by offering clear and actionable recommendations. Sp1 provides directive feedback on critical improvement areas, ensuring clarity for students. Similarly, Sp2 offers actionable suggestions for enhancement, guiding students toward better outcomes. Conversely, Sp3 addresses all thesis components, including content, structure, cohesion, and coherence. Likewise, Sp4 delivers detailed guidance with clear communication on improvement areas. Additionally, Sp5 emphasizes timely, actionable, and positive feedback to support students in advancing their thesis writing. These practices are articulated below.

"To strengthen Chapter 4, I suggest focusing on clear and systematic data processing. Start by organizing the raw data carefully to ensure it is relevant and accurate. Present the results in a logical order, highlighting key patterns that align with the research objectives. Finally, make sure the conclusions are well-supported by the analysis and address the research questions." (Sp1)

"In my opinion, students often struggle to fully understand the theories relevant to their chosen topic. As a result, they may overlook important aspects related to their title. For example, when discussing TikTok, they might forget to include theories related to instructional media, considering that TikTok is being used as a learning tool. Therefore, I usually suggest adding theoretical references that should be included in Chapter 2." (Sp2)

"When I provide feedback, I usually correct grammatical structures directly by crossing out errors or adding question marks to unclear sentences. This encourages the student to ask questions or seek clarification from me, allowing me to explain further." (Sp3)

"I suggested adding an instrument to strengthen the data and added sentences to improve readability and coherence. I even go as far as adding sentences to make their work more readable and cohesive." (Sp4)

"I often used direct written feedback by stating clear explanation both oral and written to those I think having low proficiency level of English." (Sp5)

Giving Timely Feedback

Timely feedback is a crucial element of effective thesis supervision, enabling students to address issues promptly and maintain steady progress. Sp1 employs WhatsApp for instant

messaging with students, ensuring swift responses despite occasional delays. In contrast, Sp2 effectively monitors student progress, providing regular guidance with prompt responses. Additionally, Sp3 ensures timely feedback by offering immediate revisions and being readily available for guidance. Moreover, Sp4 maintains timely feedback through conducting face-to-face meetings, utilizing a WhatsApp group for guidance, and setting structured timelines for tutoring and thesis exams. Lastly, Sp5 mandates weekly reports and consistently provides feedback without delay. These practices are depicted below.

“Since I don't meet my students daily, I use WhatsApp to communicate with them. While responses aren't always immediate, it helps me stay connected and provide guidance or clarification as needed, ensuring ongoing support despite infrequent in-person meetings.” (Sp1)

“I give weekly feedback through Google Drive, hold regular meetings, and set clear targets to boost my students' confidence. Depending on the situation, I provide written feedback or feedback over the phone, ensuring they feel supported throughout their thesis process.” (Sp2)

“I quickly request revisions to help speed up my students' graduation process. I supervise on Wednesdays and Fridays but allow students to submit their work anytime, offering flexibility and timely support to keep them on track.” (Sp3)

“In our study program, supervision occurs every Friday, and I created a WhatsApp group for continuous student guidance. I also developed a flexible timeline for tutoring sessions and thesis exams, adjusting it to each student's needs to ensure a smooth and efficient process.” (Sp4)

“I ask my students to submit weekly reports to monitor their progress and ensure continuous improvement. I make sure to provide feedback regularly, never letting days or weeks pass without it, so they stay engaged and on track throughout their thesis journey.” (Sp5)

Giving Tailored Feedback

Tailored feedback is integral to effective thesis supervision, as it addresses the unique needs and abilities of individual students. Sp1 provides tailored feedback by addressing specific improvement areas in students' theses, suggesting ways to enhance research findings. In contrast, Sp2 adapts feedback to consider students' psychological needs. Similarly, Sp3 customizes feedback to account for students' strengths and weaknesses. Additionally, Sp4 focuses on specific improvement areas based on individual student needs. Meanwhile, Sp5 tailored feedback by considering students' proficiency levels and using various methods suited to their individual needs. These practices are evidenced below.

“Since my student's research is quite general in its application, the main area for improvement lies in the interpretation and depth of their findings. Guiding them to connect their results more effectively to the broader context will help create a more focused and impactful analysis.” (Sp1)

“I always consider the psychological aspect when giving feedback. For example, with an easy-going student, I take a more relaxed approach to create a comfortable environment. This helps keep them engaged and motivated in their thesis work without feeling overwhelmed.” (Sp2)

"I strive to understand each student's background to better comprehend their character and unique needs. This allows me to approach them in a supportive way, avoiding harshness and keeping them motivated to continue their thesis work." (Sp3)

"The feedback I provide is based on the students' needs. For Chapter 4, I usually give written feedback to guide their progress. I also tailor my approach to their abilities: encouraging deeper analysis for students with strong analytical skills and focusing on helping others complete the analysis with a clear and structured approach." (Sp4)

"I usually give indirect feedback, using codes on the theses written by students with good English proficiency. For those with lower proficiency, I often provide direct feedback with clear explanations, both orally and in writing." (Sp5)

Providing Extra Time Supervision

Extra time supervision is an essential strategy in supporting students who require additional guidance to enhance their thesis work. Sp1 schedules periodic intensive supervision and offers additional sessions based on student needs. Similarly, Sp2 provides extra supervision time along with additional support. Sp3 prioritizes flexible guidance and necessary support to facilitate students' research progress. Additionally, Sp4 extends supervision by giving extra support, guidance, and resources beyond regular sessions. Lastly, Sp5 consistently provides extra time supervision for further discussions to clarify unclear feedback or as the exam schedule approaches. These practices are illustrated below.

"I provide intense feedback once a week but extra time supervision is also provided based on the student needs." (Sp1)

"The meetings are scheduled weekly, during which I provide oral guidance to the students to address any slowdowns in their progress. In one notable instance, I invited a student to work in my office for a month, which significantly enhanced their progress." (Sp2)

"I will definitely dedicate extra time to guide students. If the student asks for guidance, then I will spend extra time tutoring with the student." (Sp3)

"When the thesis exam approaches, I will definitely give the student a comprehensive overview regarding the predictive questions in thesis exam." (Sp4)

"I ask my students to submit weekly reports on their thesis writing progress and provide additional time for further discussing unclear feedbacks or as the thesis exam approaches." (Sp5)

Students' Perceptions of Supervisors' Strategies in Undergraduate Thesis Supervision

All students highlighted the pivotal role of supervisory feedback in bridging their knowledge gaps and supporting their thesis development. They recognized supervisors as key facilitators who provided critical expertise and guidance. This is illustrated below.

"Feedback is very important because, as someone new to research, I rely on the supervisor's expertise." (S1)

“Feedback is essential as it offers specific advice for improving my research, identifying areas that are incomplete or require additional work.” (S2)

“Supervisory feedback is crucial, as it not only provides significant input for the thesis-writing process but also motivates me to explore additional research references.” (S3)

“Feedback is indispensable, as we lack experience in academic research.” (S4)

“Feedback is highly important because I am still developing expertise in the field of research.” (S5)

Most students prefer direct supervision for monitoring thesis progress, addressing corrections, and making revisions. Face-to-face interactions allow students to seek clarification on unclear aspects or doubts regarding their thesis, as articulated below.

“I prefer direct feedback as written feedback can sometimes lead to misinterpretation. Clarifying the exact areas requiring revision often necessitates further discussion with the supervisor.” (S1)

“I prefer written feedback because I can simply read through it. The supervisor usually explains revisions in detail, providing complete and lengthy explanations. This method makes it easier for me to understand the feedback.” (S2)

“I prefer direct feedback. For minor feedback regarding the writing structure, I make corrections immediately in front of the advisor during our joint reading sessions. Major feedback, on the other hand, is addressed after the guidance session, typically with a specified deadline for completion.” (S3)

“I prefer receiving direct feedback. While initially receiving feedback in the form of a full-page written document, I found that explanations given directly were clearer and more concise. Therefore, I find it easier when my supervisor communicates feedback verbally.” (S4)

“I prefer the convenience of communicating with my supervisor via chat or email. This way, when I send a thesis draft, I can promptly receive feedback through the same medium.” (S5)

Moreover, most students identified the emotional support provided by supervisors as a crucial factor in maintaining motivation and managing challenges during the thesis-writing process. Supervisors’ encouragement, affirmations, and empathy played a significant role in fostering positive engagement, as depicted below.

“Motivational affirmations from my supervisor such as ‘You can do it’ alleviated my anxiety and encouraged me to persevere. Although data processing was often exhausting and challenging, the supervisor’s understanding provided a source of motivation.” (S1)

“The supervisor’s direct feedback and requests for immediate revisions were highly appreciated. Frequent supervisory meetings maintained my motivation and focus.” (S2)

“Supervisory feedback served as a critical source of motivation. Although I sometimes experienced frustration or delays, the feedback encouraged me to address tasks promptly.” (S3)

“Although revising my work was challenging, I was grateful for the supervisor’s satisfaction with the outcomes. Both the supervisor and I recognized the improvements in the results.” (S4)

“The supervisor’s encouraging remarks, such as ‘Keep up the enthusiasm to finish quickly,’ were highly motivating and inspired me to remain diligent.” (S5)

Discussion

This study provides an analysis of feedback formulation, supervisory strategies, and students’ perceptions, elucidating the multifaceted role of supervision in fostering academic progress, motivation, and success during the thesis-writing process. Regarding feedback formulation, findings show that the written feedback given by the supervisors in this study is categorized as directive, referential, and expressive. This is consistent with previous research (Adrefiza & Fortunasari, 2020; Bastola, 2020; Basturkmen et al., 2014; Kumar & Stracke, 2007; Neupane Bastola, 2021; Saeed et al., 2021; Stracke & Kumar, 2010; Xu, 2017). Notably, this study identified directive feedback to be predominant, in contrast to earlier studies emphasizing referential and expressive feedback. The frequent use of questions for seeking clarification by supervisors to engage students contributed to the prevalence of directive feedback. Xu (2017) further stated that the prevalence of directive feedback, primarily through seeking clarification and telling what to do or not to do, suggests supervisors play a facilitator role and foster a collaborative relationship with students. By emphasizing directive feedback, supervisors seek to ensure clarity, set expectations, and avoid misunderstandings, thereby fostering effective students’ thesis writing progress.

In contrast, expressive feedback was used less frequently in written communication, possibly due to supervisors’ perceptions that emotional reinforcement is less critical for immediate academic improvement (Wirawan et al., 2022) and may lack specificity in addressing corrective needs (Mukhlis & Syukri, 2020; Saeed et al., 2021). Similarly, Leo (2021) added that feedback of praise and criticism does not contribute to improving student theses. Nevertheless, all supervisors consistently delivered positive and emotional feedback orally to keep students engaged and motivated throughout the thesis writing process. Oral feedback enables immediate interaction, fosters a supportive environment, and enhances engagement, particularly for ESL students struggling with written feedback (Abdulkhaleq et al., 2013), build supervisor-student emotional connection (Prameswara & Hapsari, 2023), enhances self-confidence and motivation (Enita & Sumardi, 2023; Luna-Hernández, 2016), reduce procrastination (Diasti & Mbato, 2020), alleviate anxiety in thesis writing (Ani, 2019) and improve writing skills (Oanh, M.A., 2024). Supervisors’ emotional feedback cultivates a sense of support and belonging, which is crucial for students navigating the challenges of thesis writing (Adedokun & Oyetunde-Joshua, 2024). Consequently, consistent positive feedback encourages students to engage more actively with their supervisors (Zheng et al., 2020).

The feedback provided by supervisors predominantly emphasized content rather than linguistic accuracy or methodological aspects. This finding is consistent with Basturkmen et al. (2014) and Ene & Upton (2018) but contrasts with Xu (2017) and Teklesellassie (2019). This focus on content addresses undergraduate students’ struggles with organizing ideas, developing clear thesis statements, and presenting research coherently. By prioritizing content-related feedback, supervisors aim to enhance the overall clarity and coherence of students’ theses. This approach not only facilitates the development of well-structured academic work but also

contributes significantly to students' broader academic growth and success (Bitchener et al., 2011; Jiang & Yan, 2020; Yunita & B.D Kusuma, 2023).

The strategies employed by supervisors demonstrated a balanced integration of academic rigor and emotional support. The strategies employed by the supervisors in this study are characterized by the provision of positive, directive, timely, and tailored feedback, along with adequate time allocation for meaningful engagement. Firstly, positive feedback is essential in alleviating tension, enhancing motivation, and fostering student engagement, thereby contributing to the production of high-quality theses (Carter & Kumar, 2017; Sukarsono et al., 2023). Additionally, the motivation, availability, and responsiveness of supervisors significantly impact students' motivation, with supportive and relevant feedback helping to reduce stress and anxiety (Bastola & Hu, 2021; Khosa et al., 2024; Leo, 2021).

Furthermore, directive feedback plays a vital role in improving task performance, developing problem-solving skills, and fostering cognitive engagement by identifying issues and providing actionable guidance (Azman et al., 2014; Sosibo, 2013). Such feedback also strengthens trust and confidence, promoting student autonomy and competence (Neupane Bastola, 2022; Zheng et al., 2020). Timely feedback ensures students remain aligned with their thesis objectives, facilitates the prompt implementation of advice (Fleckenstein et al., 2023), and strengthens the supervisory relationship (Abdelhafez, 2018; Amani et al., 2022; Beattie, 2022; Josh McCarthy, 2015; O'Neill & Russell, 2019). Equally significant, tailored feedback, which addresses the individual needs of students, enhances their understanding of the research process, builds trust, and improves thesis quality (Bitchener et al., 2011; Chugh et al., 2022). Allocating additional time for supervision enables in-depth discussions, bridges learning gaps, and provides critical methodological support, particularly for students with limited research experience (Stappenbelt & Basu, 2019; Strebel et al., 2021).

Regarding students' perceptions, the findings show that all students highlighted the pivotal role of supervisory feedback in bridging their knowledge gaps and supporting their thesis development, which is consistent with prior research (Bastola & Hu, 2021; Jiang & Yan, 2020; Zheng et al., 2020). They recognized supervisors as key facilitators who provided critical expertise and guidance. This perspective aligns with existing studies that emphasize the critical role of supervisors in shaping students' academic progress and ensuring successful thesis completion (Adedokun & Oyetunde-Joshua, 2024; Bearman et al., 2024). Moreover, students were satisfied with thesis supervision, aligning with previous studies (Al Ajmi et al., 2023; Aldosari & Ibrahim, 2019; de Kleijn et al., 2013; Gedamu, 2018; Seeber & Horta, 2021; van Tienoven et al., 2022), but contradicting Neupane Bastola (2022). Positive emotions, such as satisfaction, were more commonly reported, contrasting with Geng & Yu (2022) who reported more negative emotions.

Furthermore, direct supervision is highly preferred by students for monitoring thesis progress, addressing corrections, and making revisions. This preference underscores the importance of interpersonal engagement in fostering effective thesis development. Face-to-face interactions facilitate immediate clarification of doubts (de Kleijn et al., 2013; Ganapathy et al., 2020; Grohnert et al., 2023), and enhancing the overall thesis development process (Bayona-Oré, 2018). Similarly, direct feedback is preferred by students, as it provides clear guidance for revisions, leading to improved writing quality (Budiawan et al., 2022; Jiang & Yan, 2020).

The role of emotional support was also highlighted as pivotal in maintaining student motivation and managing challenges throughout the thesis-writing process. Supervisors' encouragement, affirmations, and empathy played a significant role in fostering positive engagement (Adedokun & Oyetunde-Joshua, 2024; Khuram et al., 2023; Rantala et al., 2022; Yu & Lee, 2013). Supportive supervisory relationships positively predict students' academic engagement, which is essential for their overall success (Bayona-Oré, 2018; Cao et al., 2024). Positive relationships with supervisors also enhance motivation, facilitating a supportive environment that fosters timely progress in thesis writing (Lindsay, 2015). Additionally, motivation particularly to graduate within the expected timeframe plays a critical role in ensuring the timely completion of thesis writing, as it strengthened their commitment and resilience, enhancing self-efficacy and literacy skills (Barus, 2022; Ginting & Hutasoit, 2020).

CONCLUSION

This study underscores the pivotal role of effective feedback strategies in academic writing, particularly in thesis writing. It highlights how directive, referential, and expressive feedback, when carefully formulated and strategically implemented, can positively influence student engagement, motivation, and thesis quality, thereby supporting timely thesis completion. The findings of this study add to the existing literature by shedding light on the role of emotional support and carefully-structured feedback in thesis supervision. They also suggest that a holistic supervisory approach enhances both the academic and emotional success of students and contributes to effective thesis supervision strategies. From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that institutions should prioritize the training of thesis supervisors to deliver structured, personalized, and actionable feedback and encourage the supervisors to incorporate motivational strategies and emotional support into their supervisory practices. Future research examining the impact of different feedback types, technological tools, such as AI-driven feedback and supervisor strategies across various academic disciplines could yield valuable insights into enhancing the thesis-writing process and ensuring successful thesis completion.

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